

Gender Socialisation and its Relation to Women's Work and Family Conflict

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the impact of gender socialization in Malaysian families, especially on daughters regarding their perception towards work inside and outside the home. Hence, this study utilized in-depth interview as part of the qualitative methods to obtain quality data needed. The study establishes, that patriarchy environment, especially one with the classic model of 'breadwinner father, housewife mother' creates a pressure on women to bear more household responsibility. Thus, the dominant gender ideologies are entangled with 'motherhood mandate' and 'superior feminine virtue' that is associated with the reason women left the labour force. It was equally necessary to point out here that other agents of socialization such as media, peers and education played its part as well and influenced the respondent's conformity to patriarchal values.

Keywords: Family conflict, gender, outside the home, socialisation, work inside

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INTRODUCTION

The conceptualisation of notion 'work' is still a narrow one which is limited to either paid work in the public spheres or domestic work in the private spheres (Pettinger, Parry, Taylor, & Glucksmann, 2005). Over the years, the female labour force participation rate¹ in Malaysia has improved drastically to 54.3% in 2016, however it is still considered relatively low than the male labour force participation rate which is at 80.2% (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2017). For the prime age category which is defined from 25 to 54 years old, the participation of males in labour market exceeded 90% as compared to females which was more than 55% (DOSM, 2017).

Gender socialisation is the process whereby an individual learns the appropriate cultural behaviour of femininity or masculinity that is associated with the biological sex of male and female (Lindsey, 2005). Gender leads to sex as social assumptions about what is important to a male's behaviours determines the way of assigning sex (Ryle, 2002).

According to Department of Statistics Malaysia (2017), 70.94% of employed women works in the service industry and 17.1% in the manufacturing industry. In terms of occupations, women only hold 20.41% of managerial positions but they consist of 73.37% in terms of clerks and support staffs (DOSM, 2017). Besides gender segregation, one of the salient aspect of gender inequality in workplace faced by women is glass ceiling. Swiss and Walker (1993) states that glass ceiling is contributed by 'maternal wall', where a women's commitment to her job is doubted when she becomes pregnant and subsequently, a mother.

Hollows (2008) in her book on domestic cultures, states that there are 2 main perspectives on the issue of conflict between domesticity and public spheres, which are women either have to leave the domestic arena to fare better in public spheres or women have to be stuck in domestic spheres as they are psychologically unsuitable to compete with men in the workplace where power are held by men and rules are defined by patriarchy. The title homemaker is now being used to gradually replace the term housewife as maintenance of home should not be gendered tasks, but for both men and women (Lindsey, 2005).

Working women seek for job satisfaction and personal rewards as much as men but the difference lies in women having to find the right balance between the dual role they play which is employee and mother or wife (Swiss &

¹ Labour force participation rate consists of those between the age of 15 to 64, including those employed and non-employed. Employment status refers to either an employer, an employee, own account workers and unpaid family workers (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2017).